

In May 2014, Prime Minister Moana Carcasses Kalosil of the Green Confederation (GC) was removed from office by a no-confidence vote initiated by the opposition. He was replaced by Joe Natuman, who himself withstood a motion of no-confidence brought by Carcasses within weeks of taking office.

In January, Parliament approved the controversial Capital Investment Immigration Program, which takes advantage of the desire of mainland Chinese citizens to acquire residency in Hong Kong, for which they must have resident status in a country other than China. In exchange for \$300,000 in combined application fees and investments in Vanuatu, the program offers citizenship in Vanuatu without requiring that applicants physically reside in or even visit the island nation. A Hong Kong-based firm has been contracted to execute the program. Some critics oppose the program for its lack of transparency, while others have voiced opposition to the sale of citizenship.

Vanuatu continued to develop bilateral ties with China in 2014, actively seeking more Chinese loans, assistance, investments, and tourism. This relationship has been cause for some domestic discontent, and there is concern from local residents about the growing number of Chinese-owned businesses.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 32 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

The constitution provides for parliamentary elections every four years. The prime minister, who appoints his own cabinet, is chosen by the 52-seat unicameral Parliament from among its members. Members of Parliament and the heads of the six provincial governments form an electoral college to select the largely ceremonial president for a five-year term. The National Council of Chiefs works in parallel with Parliament, exercising authority mainly over language and cultural matters.

In general elections held in October 2012, the Vanua'aku Party (VP) won 8 seats, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) took 6 seats, the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP) captured 5 seats, and the National United Party (NUP) took 4 seats. The remainder of the 52 seats went to 12 other parties and several independent candidates.

Legislators chose Natuman to replace Carcasses as prime minister in May 2014. Carcasses himself attempted to unseat Natuman weeks later with a no-confidence motion, which the new prime minister survived. Lack of legislative support forced Carcasses to withdraw yet another no-confidence motion in November.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Many political parties are active, including the GC, the VP, the UMP, the PPP, and the NUP. However, politicians frequently switch affiliations, and political loyalties are heavily driven by linguistic and tribal identity. No-confidence votes have forced several changes of government in recent years, including in 2014, and such frequent changes in government have had an adverse effect on the stability of governance.

In 2013, Parliament amended the constitution to allow dual citizenship.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Abuse of office and corruption are serious problems that stir deep public grievance. Mismanagement of funds often leads to poor conditions in public facilities like prisons, hospitals, and schools. Both domestic and international critics have condemned the practice of politicians granting diplomatic passports for personal gain. The Capital Investment Immigration Program was the target of scrutiny in 2014, with opponents raising concerns about the lack of measures for ensuring transparency and accountability in the processing of applications and related funds.

In November 2014, Parliament suspended 16 opposition members, including Carcasses, for allegedly accepting bribes and violating the Leadership Code. Carcasses admitted to depositing sums of up to \$10,000 into the bank accounts of several lawmakers but claimed that they were private loans, rather than bribes. The suspended lawmakers took their case to the Supreme Court, which in December ruled their suspensions to be invalid, finding that parliamentary procedure does not allow for the suspension of a lawmaker for alleged actions outside of Parliament.

Live internet streaming of parliamentary sessions was initiated in 2013. Anticorruption advocates expressed hopes that this will increase legislative accountability in addition to connecting voters with affairs in Parliament.

Civil Liberties: 47 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The government generally respects the freedoms of speech and the press, though elected officials have been accused of threatening journalists for critical reporting. The number of internet users is growing, but access is limited by high cost and lack of infrastructure.

The government generally respects freedom of religion in this predominantly Christian country. Academic freedom is also respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The law provides for freedoms of assembly and association, and the government typically upholds these rights. Public demonstrations are permitted by law and generally allowed in practice. Civil society groups are active on a variety of issues.

Workers can bargain collectively and strike. Two independent trade unions are organized under the umbrella Vanuatu Council of Trade Unions.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

The judiciary is largely independent, but lack of resources hinders the hiring and retention of qualified judges and prosecutors. Long pretrial detentions are not uncommon. Tribal chiefs often adjudicate local disputes.

In June, two Chinese nationals wanted in China for fraud were arrested and deported.

Prisons fail to meet minimum international standards. In June, authorities announced that they were seeking nearly \$10 million in aid from New Zealand to upgrade the country's prisons. Harsh treatment of prisoners, police brutality, and lax management are causes of frequent prison riots and escapes. Seven high-risk inmates escaped from prison in May 2014.

No law provides explicit protections for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. There were no reports of violence against them in 2014.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 11 / 16

Women often face discrimination and violence because of traditional views and prejudices, as well as a persisting lack of legal protections. No law prohibits spousal rape, domestic abuse, or sexual harassment. Social stigma and fear of reprisal inhibits reporting, and police and courts rarely intervene or impose strong penalties. A 2013 amendment to the municipal electoral law reserved a number of seats for women in the Port Vila Municipal Council; five women had seats as of January 2014.

The rapid expansion of Chinese-owned businesses has fueled resentment among native Vanuatu residents. In 2013, the government expanded the list of occupations reserved for those native to Vanuatu.

Vanuatu was not rated in the U.S. State Department's 2014 *Trafficking in Persons Report*. The country is not a signatory to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Local and foreign reports suggest some incidence of human trafficking.

Vanuatu has the highest annual population growth rate in the world at 2.3 percent and the fourth highest fertility rate at 4.1 births per woman.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)